



A recent count of the buffalo on the Henry Mountains results in a call for a conditional hunt for November.

Buffalo are doing well on mountain range

Utah's buffalo herd is doing well — too well, in fact.

The Utah Board of Big Game Control has authorized a conditional bison hunt to reduce the number of adult bison in the Henry Mountain bison herd, one of the last free-roaming herds in North America.

"The purpose of the hunt is two-fold," says Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Big Game Program Coordinator Wes Shields. "Forage in the area has been reduced due to five years of intensive drought, and herds must be reduced to fall within range carrying capacity," says Shields, adding, "present bison numbers exceed those set in an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management and ranchers who graze livestock on the Henrys."

This year, the board issued 60 permits — 20 for each of three hunting dates — for the 1991 season for resident hunters. It also issued six nonresident and one bid permit.

The board also approved six permits — five resident and 1 nonresident — for the Antelope Island herd.

Traditionally, this has been one of Utah's more successful hunts.

In the past 16 years, hunters have been 100 percent successful

on seven of the hunts. In the last five years, success has run 100, 98, 96, 90 and 82 percent, respectively.

Last year, in an attempt to reduce numbers, in part because of the drought, 184 permits were issued. Of those, 150 were filled. In 1989, 67 permits were issued with 60 of those being filled.

Utah's herd of buffalo on the Henry Mountains was obtained from Yellowstone National Park in 1941. That transplant consisted of three bulls and 15 cows.

Over the years there has been a gradual buildup of buffalo on the unit.

According to Jim Karpowitz, game manager for the Southeastern Region, the buffalo herd is in good shape this year, which is one reason for the extra hunt.

The only problem he foresees is in road conditions come time for the first hunt — Oct. 5. Heavy rain last week, more than 3½ inches, caused extensive damage to roads in the area. A little early scouting is advised.

Currently the DWR and the Utah Wildlife Federation are working together to obtain additional rangeland for the Henry Mountain bison and help insure the future of this unique herd.

Officials take aim on ways to deter poaching

Conservationists and wildlife officials support proposed changes in Utah codes that would crack down on poachers and ease up on hunters who unwittingly violate the law.

The groups met earlier this year for a hearing of the Legislature's Energy, Natural Resources and Agriculture Interim Committee.

One change involves the complicated and potentially controversial task of setting minimum restitution values for different types of wildlife.

For example, the worth of rare animals like bison, bighorn sheep or cougars was set at \$1,000. A duck was valued at \$15. A fish was worth \$10.

Under the current system, wildlife restitution charges are set in court and the Division of Wildlife Resources must go through a

lengthy process in order to justify the restitution costs.

If the Legislature were to adopt the standardized law, the process would be simpler and fairer.

"The figures we set were conservative," said Bruce Johnson, chief of law enforcement for the DWR. "We don't want to appear to the Legislature or to the public like we're trying to make a windfall of money."

Another change in the wildlife code would allow courts to levy heavier fines for professional poachers while going lighter on hunters who accidentally kill an animal illegally and turn themselves over to authorities.

Under the proposal, killing animals worth less than \$500 would be the equivalent of a speeding ticket. But, taking an animal worth more than that could involve a more serious felony charge.

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